



## GUIDELINE 9

*Schools provide a positive dining environment that encourages a pleasant eating experience.*

### BEST PRACTICES

- ★ Action for Healthy Kids, State of Idaho
- ★ Focus on the Future, Roseville, Minnesota
- ★ Loveland City Schools, Loveland, Ohio
- ★ Mix It Up at Lunch Day, Springfield, Oregon
- ★ Ed’s Place, Suffolk, England
- ★ Parkway School District, Chesterfield, Missouri

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*“Public health and wellness are truly community issues. Individual institutions, such as families and schools, are not equipped to resolve obesity problems alone. We must all band together to improve ourselves and the lifestyle choices made by our children. School food service departments must lead the way in Ohio by serving as role models for the community and by shaping the nutritional path for the future of our children.*

D.E. Hawkey, director, Food Services, Columbus Public Schools



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### *Schools provide a positive dining environment that encourages a pleasant eating experience.*

Eating is most enjoyable and can be healthiest when it is experienced as a social event. Oftentimes, however, schools have limited time for lunch because of the sheer volume of students or the need to spend as much of the day as possible on academics. Allowing students time to sit down and eat in a pleasant and social environment may slow down their eating. Fresh fruits, vegetables and an overall well-balanced meal take more time to eat than chicken tenders and fries. Offering a dining experience similar to that of a restaurant — in which people socialize and eat a meal in a clean, pleasing environment — teaches students healthier eating habits and may even contribute to an alert classroom filled with students ready to learn after lunch.

#### **OBJECTIVE:**

### *Schools will provide an adequate amount of time for students to eat in a clean, comfortable and social environment.*

With a positive dining environment in place, students will reap the benefits of having more time to interact socially and enjoy their lunches. In an environment that is comfortable, students will have the time and space to sit down and eat their lunches, instead of grabbing something on the go. To provide a pleasant eating experience, schools may:

- Make meal periods long enough for students to eat and socialize;
- Provide adequate serving areas and lines, so students don't spend too much time in line;
- Schedule recess before lunch in the elementary schools;
- Practice food preparation safety techniques; and
- Provide hand-washing equipment, so students can wash their hands before eating.

#### ★ 1. Action for Healthy Kids, State of Idaho

**Background:** In April 2005, the state of Idaho released its “Implementation Guide for School Wellness Policy: Action for Healthy Kids.” Guide recommendations include surveying students for their opinions on menu items and posting nutrition information on the back of menus that are then distributed to teachers and parents. Schools are encouraged to guarantee at least 10 minutes for breakfast and 20 minutes for lunch, with no school activities planned during those times. Also recommended are cafeteria designs that focus on minimizing time spent waiting in lines for food and providing adult role models to encourage students to eat well-balanced meals.

#### **For more information:**

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org>



### ❖ 2. Focus on the Future: What Eating at School Should Look Like, Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, Roseville, Minnesota

**Background:** A focus group study and report, commissioned by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, evaluated the perceptions of high school students regarding school lunch programs. Of the eight schools in the study, the student bodies from six were dissatisfied with their programs. Students from the two schools who were satisfied with their lunch programs attended schools where new lunch or cafeteria areas had been built within two years prior to the study.

The students answered numerous questions about menu items, environment and overall experience. One question, for example, was, “What atmosphere or environment would you like to have for school meals?”

**Duration:** The study was held in conjunction with food expositions that took place in the spring of 2001 in Fargo, North Dakota, and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**Success:** The answers received from the students fell into five categories. Here is a summary of their answers.

#### **Less Crowding**

“It needs to be less crowded. I just hate it when I’m sitting at the table and I’m eating and someone kicks your chair. I don’t even want to eat lunch, because there is not enough room. The tables get so crowded that you have to eat all scrunched up—with no elbow room.”

Many responses complained about a lack of space. Some students reported they were forced to eat standing up due to lack of space. Another student concluded that lack of accessibility might actually hamper the ability of disabled or injured students to move comfortably.

#### **Flexible Table Configurations**

“I would like to see round tables instead of long rectangular tables, so that you can interact more easily with the people at your table.”

Related is the students’ feeling that a break from classes should be a positive social time with their friends. Currently, they feel it is not a social break due to the limitations rectangular seating places on them.

#### **A Relaxing, Comfortable, Appealing Environment**

“Space out the tables and shorten lines to get less traffic and commotion. It feels like they are trying to speed you through, to get you to eat really fast and get out. All the bumping and jostling really bothers me.”

“Lunch time should be something to look forward to. You’re getting out of class and can get book work off your mind for a little bit. Instead, it is so crowded you can’t relax; and then it’s like a jail when you get your food...They just slop the food on your plate and move you along...It would be nice if you could go outside and eat when the weather is nice. If the feeling was springtime and freshness, I think I would tend to eat healthier foods and less greasy foods.”



Many students expressed concern about the time allotted for lunch. Many felt rushed, or that they spent so much time in line that they could not enjoy their food. In addition, students gave many comments about the appearance of the food, tables and chairs, as well as a desire to see plants or updated artwork added, to make the atmosphere more pleasant.

**Improve the Attitude of Kitchen Workers**

“If our cooks would have a better attitude, it would help improve the environment.” These students felt that the staff involved in the lunch program has as important an effect on the atmosphere of lunch as the food and the space layout.

**Provide Natural Lighting**

“It would be nice if we could have some skylights about the eating area to let a little daylight in. Or some windows, so that the only light wasn’t from fluorescent bulbs. That would improve the environment and make it more comfortable and relaxed.”

Student responses primarily focused on the benefits of relaxing, comfortable and appealing environments while eating meals in the cafeteria.

Here are some comments from the students that attended the newly updated schools:

“I like the eating area the way it is, but we have TV monitors on the wall showing school announcements. We should have some programs on to watch while you are eating—even if it was just a video on school projects.”

“Our eating area is a commons available to people all day long. I wouldn’t change anything about it. There are plenty of circular tables and chairs, it’s roomy, and there are skylights. It’s great for just talking to friends.”

The report is a good tool to support the decision-making process for school officials when they consider ways to improve the cafeteria environment for students in their building and remodeling programs.

**For more information:**

<https://fns.state.mn.us/FNSProg/NSLP/PDF/Resources/CFLFoodSumm.pdf>

★ **3. Loveland City Schools, Loveland, Ohio**

**Background:** The Loveland City School District has implemented various techniques to encourage its students to eat healthier. After meeting with and talking to the students, the district applied the changes that the students requested. The district worked with a nutrition advisory council, which helped develop policies, projects and ideas to support the lunch program staff. A self-service fruit and vegetable bar is now available in every cafeteria. The cafeteria staff also prepares food “on time,” or on an “as-needed” basis. Finally, Loveland City School District has replaced white bread with whole wheat bread. It only offers fat-free and one percent milk and makes nutrition guidelines available for all products sold in the cafeteria.



**Success:** The program has helped encourage students to eat healthy not only at school, but also at home. Students now eat more fruits and vegetables and whole-wheat products for lunch. Parents let students buy their lunch at school more often because they trust that their students are better educated in the choices that they make.

### ✦ 4. Mix It Up at Lunch Day, Ferguson Middle School, Springfield, Oregon

**Background:** Mix It Up at Lunch Day occurs annually and encourages students to cross social boundaries to try and create a more positive lunch environment. The event encourages students to swap seats in the cafeteria with different groups of people and to break out of their comfort zones to meet new people. This initiative is important because a survey of middle and high school students showed that a majority of students feel that schools were quick to put people into groups. A survey also revealed that 40 percent of students admitted they rejected someone from another group and one-third said that it was hard to become friends and maintain a friendship with someone from another group.

**Duration:** The program, implemented in 2005, continues.

**Success:** The Mix It Up at Lunch Day project revealed that students felt that the diversity among groups of students was most evident in the cafeteria during lunchtime. Kathleen Jackson, assistant principal and organizer of Mix It Up at Lunch Day, said she was surprised to see tables filled with students chatting with classmates they didn't know. "I see several kids who usually eat lunch alone talking and mingling with everybody," Jackson said. "It's wonderful."

Pablo Martinez, a 16-year-old sophomore, is one of the students who sometimes sits alone at lunch. He said Mix It Up at Lunch Day is "a chance to sit with people you normally don't sit with and not be afraid about getting rejected or laughed at."

**For more information:**

<http://www.tolerance.org/teens/stories/article.jsp?p=0&ar=162>

<http://www.tolerance.org/teens/stories/article.jsp?p=0&ar=69>

### ✦ 5. Ed's Place, King Edward VI School, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, England

**Background:** Busy and demanding academic periods were taking critical time from school lunches, which had shrunk to just 40 minutes long. They were becoming chaotic, hurried, noisy and unhealthy. Students were hurried through lines and given no time to relax. This situation created behavior issues throughout the afternoon. As a result, King Edward VI School began placing an emphasis on creating a more positive eating environment for its students. One teacher, Geoff Barton, transformed a corner of the school into a healthy cafe-style space known as Ed's Place. Decorated with contemporary furniture, Ed's Place is open 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. daily, serving sandwiches, salads, fruit and pasta. Students can grab a skinny latte and a healthy snack while they study.



**Duration:** Ed’s Place opened in 2002 and is still open today.

**Success:** Many students have opted for the laid-back atmosphere of Ed’s Place over the noise and commotion of the lunch room. They are staying on campus and enjoying the relaxing, healthier foods. In fact, the success has been so great that a plan to build a brand new, larger Ed’s Place is under way to accommodate more students. The feeling of independence to choose the foods they want to eat seems appealing to students. As one student stated, “This must be what it’s like to be at university.”

**For more information:**

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schoolmeals/story/0,15643,1442749,00.html>

★ **6. Parkway School District, Chesterfield, Missouri**

**Background:** The Parkway School District’s Board of Education is proposing a five-year plan to adopt the USDA’s Dietary Guidelines for Americans as the district’s fundamental nutritional standard. Some of the guidelines include allowing adequate time and space for students to have an unhurried and pleasant atmosphere, which will lead to developing more positive eating behaviors.

**Duration:** The research to develop and implement these goals started in 2003 and is ongoing.

**For more information:**

[http://www.pkwy.k12.mo.us/foodservice/Web\\_version.pdf](http://www.pkwy.k12.mo.us/foodservice/Web_version.pdf)

<http://www.pkwy.k12.mo.us/boe/bdgoalsHealthyKids.cfm>

**RESOURCES**

**Customer Service and SIS Training**

The Neighborhood Network of Trainers (NNT) is an education and training service provided through the Ohio Department of Education, Office for Safety, Health and Nutrition. Qualified instructors use specialized programs and materials to assist local school food service programs with staff development. The American School Food Service Association has approved all NNT training sessions for specialized training and continuing education credit.

<http://www.ode.state.oh.us> (Search: Food Service or Food and Nutrition.)

**Kids First Rhode Island**

This site provides resources for enhancing nutrition and physical education. The Kids First program puts special attention on cafeteria improvement and nutritional education. The site also offers best practice models for a successful cafeteria environment.

<http://www.kidsfirstri.org>



### **Training materials developed for food service personnel**

This site includes a list of resources and contacts to help food service personnel make food attractive and nutritious for students. Materials were developed through the Pennsylvania Department of Education in collaboration with Pennsylvania State University.

<http://nutrition.psu.edu/projectpa>

### **Recess scheduling consideration in the school lunch environment**

The importance of physical activity for children of all ages and supervised playtime for younger children is duly acknowledged. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines physical activity as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in an expenditure of energy. It is encouraged that schools provide recess before lunch or at a different time than lunch at all appropriate sites. Physical activity standards for Arizona Schools can be viewed in the Physical Activity section.

<http://www.ade.az.gov/>

### **Other recess-related resources include:**

Recess in Elementary Schools, National Association for Sport and Physical Education

<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe>

### **Relationships of Meal and Recess Schedules to Plate Waste in Elementary Schools, published by the National Food Service Management Institute**

<http://www.nfsmi.org>